
Artivistic fieldwork: participatory platforms, devised events, and socially engaged art storymaking

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Abstract: This abstract paper outlines the issues and concerns of an artist-organiser's practice-led research and thesis. It introduces the main case-study of the author's involvement at an autonomous culture centre/greenhouse and allotment in central Helsinki, noting an emphasis on storytelling as a means of sharing subjective experience; in a particular place over different periods of time and involvement. Highlighted are anticipated multi-disciplinary references needed to tackle the writing of the fieldwork, and opens up the inquiry: what might be artistic and activist-orientated fieldwork?; and how might this serve contested and intangible cultural heritage issues?

Keywords: participatory arts; online platforms; socially-engaged arts; workshop organisation; storytelling; storymaking; digital culture and society; fieldwork; activism; public space.

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Biographical notes: Andrew Gryf Paterson is a Scottish artist-organiser, cultural producer and doctoral candidate, based in Helsinki, Finland. His work involves variable roles of initiator, participant, author and curator, according to different collaborative and cross-disciplinary processes. He works across the fields of media/network/environmental activism, pursuing a participatory arts practice through workshops, performative events, and storytelling. He has presented in seminars, events and conferences within both academic and independent venues across Europe and North America. He has coordinated workshops for multi-disciplinary professionals, students and young people in Scotland, England, Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Norway, Turkey, USA, and Australia.

This practice-led research project reflects upon the author's own fieldwork-actions in socially-engaged art processes and workshops, using online and participatory platforms to support engagement in specific material-physical sites. It benefits from conceptual and practical influence and personal experience in the independent media/network arts festivals of Finland, Latvia, and the Baltic sea region; with cross-disciplinary reference to

social arts and design, archaeological-performance theory, critical fieldwork practice, open planning and activism in urban and public space.

The research focuses with a case-study reflection of my personal involvement at 'Happihuone' (Oxygen-room in English), a greenhouse and garden allotment in the city centre that served as a forum for environmental arts, urban gardening, sustainable design and ecological practices; including exhibitions, workshops, lectures, music events. See Figure 1. In November 2005 and July 2007, I in collaboration with others, 'imagineered' two participatory projects on-site, which focused on the sustenance of the tangible and cultural heritage onsite ¹. See Figure 2. Further-more, following physical dismantling of the structure by supporters of the venue in October 2007, to making way for the city-planned 'Finlandiapuisto', ² this research leads cross-organisational activist work to promote and organise a public forum which discusses a replacement 'citizen's-institution' in Helsinki.

Figure 1 'Happihuone' Cultural Greenhouse during the summer of 2005 (see online version for colours)



Figure 2 Star patterns created by participants of workshop in November of 2005. The workshop occurred in the context of the Forces of Light (Valonvoimat) Festival in Helsinki. (see online version for colours)



What is explored in this case-study, are not just the subjective and objective, tangible and intangible histories of Happihuone and its environment; but a reflective thesis that explores how this author found himself telling and projecting that particular place's story, and the responsibilities involved.

'Artivistic' is a borrowed term³ which suggests the interplay of art and activist practices, and my approach to engagement, broadly characterised as 'creative imagineering' of other possible worlds. From an 'artivistic' perspective, my 'fieldwork actions' are intended to respect pre-existing tangible and intangible cultural heritage, promote social change and awareness of contextual and environmental issues; essentially engaging for a progressive politic (Duncombe, 2007).

The fieldwork is emboldened with intellectual support from interaction/media design (Krippendorff, 2006), performance/archaeology hybridity (Pearson, 2006), archaeologies of the contemporary past (Buchli and Lucas, 2001), indigenous culture (Harvey, 2006), and reflective ethnography (Geertz, 1983). These readings remind and reinforce that many sites of investigation are themselves, a variable mix of material and intangible, historical and contested spaces. Ones where self-organised and designated structures have been applied with 'grassroots' and 'authorised' network support; where direct and mediated experiences have been made in the process; where open, free, privatised, commercial, cultural, imperial, and corporate influences are and have been historically applied.

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Notes

¹'Tätikuvitelma' Workshop/Light art installation was co-produced with Simo Haanpää, in collaboration with 45 students, friends and ad-hoc others, at 'Happihuone' Cultural Greenhouse; in the context of 'Valon Voimat' Festival, Helsinki, Finland, 2005, <http://apaterso.info/projects/tahtikuvitelma/>

'Hengitä.hankala hengittää/Breathe.difficult to breathe' writer-in-residence at 'Happihuone' Cultural Greenhouse; in the context of urban redevelopment at Töölölahti, Helsinki, Finland, 2007, <http://hengita.info/>

²'Finlandiapuisto' (Finland's Park), <http://www.finlandiapuisto.fi/>

³"Artivistic emerges out of the proposition that not only artists talk about art, academics about theory, and activists about activism", Montreal, Canada, October 2007, <http://artivistic.org/>

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